

SCTA cancels 2014 Bonneville Speed Week



Danny Thompson with Challenger II at Bonneville, August 2014. Photo by Holly Martin/Peter Vincent, courtesy Thompson LSR.

As any Bonneville Salt Flats racer can attest, building a car fast enough to set a record and making it to the salt is only half the battle. After days of heavy rain turned much of the Bonneville salt flats (including two speed record courses) into a lake, on Saturday, August 9, the [Southern California Timing Association \(SCTA\)](#) announced the cancellation of the 2014 Bonneville Speed Week.

The event, set to run from August 9-15, was to have marked the 100th anniversary of land speed record racing on the salt. In 1914, Indianapolis 500 driver Teddy Tetzlaff became the first to use the Bonneville Salt Flats in a land speed record attempt. Driving a specially prepared, 200-horsepower “Blitzen Benz 2,” Tetzlaff pushed the land speed record bar to 142.8 MPH, to the delight of promoter Ernest Moross and his Moross Amusement Company. Despite proving the viability of the salt for record attempts, it would take until the late 1920s and early 1930s for another racer, Utah native David Abbot “Ab” Jenkins, to put Bonneville on the map for further land speed record attempts.

As late as Friday afternoon, August 8, SCTA staff were still optimistically laying out markers on Course 2,

but by Saturday morning it had become apparent that the salt would not dry sufficiently to hold events this week. On Saturday, August 9, the SCTA made the decision to cancel this year's Speed Week, but opened discussion on extending its next Bonneville event, the World Finals, from four days to a full week. A decision will likely be reached at the next SCTA board meeting, scheduled for August 22. As of now, the World Finals are set to take place from September 30 through October 3, but changes will be posted to the [SCTA website](#).

One of the racers set to make a record attempt on the salt this week was Danny Thompson, son of the legendary Mickey Thompson, who was the first driver to top 400 MPH at Bonneville with the Challenger 1 in 1960. A record escaped the elder Thompson, since the car broke down on the return run, leaving Craig Breedlove as the first to set a two-way average above 400 MPH. Mickey Thompson returned to Bonneville with a new piston-driven streamliner, the Challenger 2, for 1968, but, coincidentally, his record attempt would also be rained out. Sponsorship dried up after 1968, and the Challenger 2 sat parked in Thompson's shop for over four decades.

Mickey and Danny Thompson began discussing another attempt at a piston driven land speed record in 1988, shortly before the elder Thompson's murder. It would take Danny Thompson another 22 years to pull the Challenger II out of retirement and begin the work necessary to meet modern safety standards, but by 2014, the Challenger II was ready for the salt. Instead of the original two Ford 427-cu.in. V-8s sending a combined output of 1,800 hp to all four wheels, the reborn Challenger II features a pair of nitromethane-powered Chrysler Hemi V-8s, each producing a reported 2,000 horsepower, sending power to all four wheels via twin three-speed gearboxes. While that should provide ample power to top the current piston-driven record of 462 MPH, nothing about land speed record racing is ever certain until the runs are in the record books.

For Danny Thompson, the record attempt will have to wait, but as the [Thompson LSR website](#) states, "racing is full of unfinished business."